

## Chapter 4: You Are a People Who Behave Senselessly

A long time ago, I bought a compass to help direct me towards the *qibla* (direction of prayer for Muslims). That was something I found strange about Muslims. Islam, like all identities, had a social performance required for one to receive social inclusion. But I rarely found a Muslim who took this social performance to include a compass on their person, a bottle of water for *wudū'* (ritual ablution) on their person, and the *salāh* times for a (relatively) nearby *masjid* on their phone. It was as if ignorance provided Muslims with an alibi in case they were outdoors or travelling and did not perform *salāh*, or performed it haphazardly, relying on whatever they could get ad hoc. But for me at least, these things removed any ambiguity. I deliberately prayed properly, or I deliberately did not pray.

The same was true for food. If I went out, I brought some granola bars or food prepared at home, and unless I bought packaged, baked goods that did not include any animal-derived ingredients, that was all I ate. I started asking generative AI programs about these ingredients, and that was how I found out chocolate liquor was not made with liquor and root beer was not made with beer. But these programs also told me that whey powder, monoglycerides, and diglycerides could be *harām*. Whey is a byproduct of cheese production, and if the enzymes involved were derived from *harām* rennet (which would be extracted from the stomach lining of unweaned calves rather than microbes or plants or *halāl* calves), the whey would be *harām*. Likewise, mono and diglycerides are emulsifiers, which could be derived from plants or animal

fats.<sup>1</sup> I do not know enough about food or biology to verify these programs, but the doubts which sprang forth were intolerable.

Something about me was always uneasy about praying *salāh* outside in public spaces where others could see. I eventually realized that wearing that black *thawb* every time I went outside would make it natural, like becoming a priest in no-man's land, his pointy mitre protecting him from a bullet to the brain. It was hot in the summer, especially with the black leather coat on top, but Muslim women are often socially conditioned into wearing many layers of black clothes, so I must endure. The leather coat at least doubled as a makeshift prayer mat, the knives in my pockets available just in case (presuming no cops would notice the knives and arrest me). Regardless, it provided security, so I started wearing the *thawb* and cargo pants all the time despite the wires crushing my skull.

Even though I had all these preparations, the 'asr (afternoon prayer) and *magrib* (sunset prayer) *salāh* I performed at the library did not hold any meaning. It was no longer a prayer. It was just a series of motions carved into my mind. A part of me knew that my fate was sealed a long time ago, and no movement of lips instilled a connection to anything that said otherwise. I used to get a sense of connection to Him through *salāh*, but that too was gone. So once the sky became pitch black, I left the library meekly, no closer to *Jannāt* (heaven) than I was to a job, which meant that there was just one place left to go.

I boarded the public transit, but something compelled me to get off at the wrong station, turning onto a street which was a half-hour's walk from the hospital. The road was closed to vehicles, making way for folks of many stripes and dispositions. They filled the street with their neon lights, their tents and floats from which music shrieked, security and police to keep the peace, and advertising the likes of which could rival Nascar. Rainbows were plastered on

windows, balconies, patios, banks, bars, benches, and crosswalks, enough for one to think that a unicorn retched all over the place.

I walked around a crosswalk painted blue, pink, and white, and caught small glimpses of the people entering and exiting clubs, bars, and restaurants. They wore drunken smiles, deafened themselves with music, and were predominantly of White and East Asian background, reflected in the food they ate as well. This country had large celebrations in the month of pride, though I never visited any. I watched them online the same way one would watch a documentary on Bonobos. The feeling that something was always watching me kept me from even thinking about being connected to these events. Perhaps this was how some felt the presence of God, but that feeling was not exclusively tied to monotheism. Sometimes it felt like I was under the judgemental eyes of the *malā'ika* (angels), *jinn* (spirits), and *shayātīn*. Sometimes it felt like I was being shamed by the spirits of dead ancestors. Sometimes it felt like I was being watched by time travellers from the future. I policed my behavior in a futile attempt to prevent the time travellers from laughing at my embarrassing private moments.<sup>2</sup> I was not superstitious, just paranoid about the things I did not know about the things I did not know.

It is the same kind of paranoia you might feel if I told you that there is someone in your room right now, a couple feet away from you. You cannot see them, but you can hear them if you stayed quiet. Just stay completely, imperceptibly, still. Do not move a muscle. Only bad things will happen if you see them. You must be a statue, completely immobile. Do not move your fingers. Do not move your tongue in your mouth. Do not let a single muscle move. But do not hold in your breath either, that only makes it worse. Breathe in and out slowly, imperceptibly, as if the wind is merely passing through you. Stay like that, until they pass over.

But even if I ignored the religious dimension, all the activity, all the people, all the

sounds, all the white Canadian-ness, reminded me that I should not be here for long. I was merely a traveller passing through, no different than stumbling into a store for high-end fashion and jewellery. So, I kept going, melting inside the leather coat as I pushed against throngs of free-spirited drunkards. Their faces, their skin, their clothes, their attitude, it all existed on another dimension. I will admit this country's queer culture was not entirely white and East Asian. There were dashes of melanin among them: Southeast Asians, Africans, Hindus, apostates (presumably). But their appearance betrayed a gulf separating me from all of them. The men often had piercings, tattoos, and dyed hair. They adorned themselves in jewellery and clothes of a thousand different colours. Some of them exposed their chests, limbs and torsos to cool down and show off their rippling muscles. The women were the same, their makeup and coloured hair shining in the light while crop tops, shorts, leggings, and skirts of many colours hugged their bodies, revealing lace, fishnets, jewellery, skin, and tattoos.

It was admirable that they felt safe enough to wear such things without the fear of eyes casting judgement upon their every move. But it all reminded me that I would never belong in this place. The gentrification in this neighborhood made that obvious on an intellectual level,<sup>3</sup> but there is a difference between knowing where you do not belong and feeling where you do not belong. They could forget their sins for a time while mine crushed me asunder. They could find solace in others while I was an alien to the world. Their momentary bliss could be witnessed, but it could never be experienced. I took a drink of water to quell the immature envious rage which wished to cave their skulls in (I suppose that is a feature of self-awareness). Whatever it was that was always watching me would probably find my immoral rage quite amusing, the same way one would find the futile scurrying of a cockroach amusing.

I knew this was unhealthy. Being queer and being Muslim does not necessitate a life of suffering. Samra Habib outlined a better approach to life in their<sup>4</sup> 2019 memoir, *We Have Always Been Here*. Habib chronicles the religious persecution they faced in Pakistan based on their Ahmadiyya (minority sect of Islam) identity,<sup>5</sup> their family's experience immigrating to this country,<sup>6</sup> the experiences<sup>7</sup> which led them to become independent from their family,<sup>8</sup> the community they found among queer Westerners<sup>9</sup> and queer Muslims<sup>10</sup> while exploring their queer identity,<sup>11</sup> and their family eventually coming around to accept them.<sup>12</sup> There are many useful insights in Habib's memoir.

But I existed on a different dimension. I come from an orthodox *Sunnī* (dominant Islamic sect) family. I did not experience sexual trauma as a child.<sup>13</sup> I did not understand His language, His culture, or His country, so His God was the only thing which connected us. I was not pushed into an arranged marriage,<sup>14</sup> and I did not grow up in a physically violent household,<sup>15</sup> so I had no real justification<sup>16</sup> for abandoning Him. I did not have any friends I could trust,<sup>17</sup> so I had no way of abandoning Him either. I could understand Habib's experiences intellectually, but I could not connect with their soul in a way that could convince me to change my life. The same was true for other queer Muslims I read about. Many interviewed in Afdhere Jama's 2013 book, *Queer Jihad*, recalled queer behavior at a young age,<sup>18</sup> but I could scarcely recall any memories from when I was young. I could vaguely recall locations, but I could not recall any of the events happening in those locations. It was like trudging through a blizzard all my life, my tracks covering themselves up behind me. Since I did not share in the experiences that made them queer Muslims, I constantly asked myself if I was making it all up, inventing an identity to excuse myself of accountability.

Perhaps the problem was my failure to be a part of a “found family.” Habib mentioned

meeting a trans woman from Tunisia who argued that queer Muslims should be united by their sense of community, their desire for safety and happiness, and their aspirations for a better world.<sup>19</sup> If I was part of their community, perhaps I could have bridged the differences between us through these common aspirations.

But could I have been part of their community? Habib seemed to understand Islam as spirituality, love, and kindness, influenced by *Sūfī* (Islamic mystic) discourses popular among reformers.<sup>20</sup> For me, Islam was law. There were legal sources, interpretations, maxims, precedents, abrogation, arguments, decisions, and eventually, punishments. It was the only thing that could give my life consistency, integrity, and accountability as far as I was concerned. I knew of unorthodox and *Sūfī* ways of understanding religion, but I did not perceive consistency, integrity, and accountability in these worldviews, nor could I convince myself that their way of viewing things had a strong relevance to *qawā'id al-fiqh* (legal maxims in *fiqh*). One could believe that all Canadians deserve to be happy, but that assertion would not mean much in a Canadian court, so I never considered God's court to be any different.

Besides, how could someone claim to understand God's "love?" For a king, an execution might be considered a sort of sovereign "love," and while that might be incomprehensible for a commoner, it might be natural from the perspective of kings accustomed to the application of torture and cruelty in the name of sovereign order. For God, this incomprehensibility must be a thousand-fold greater. Many Muslims already believe this, though they do not take their beliefs to its logical conclusion. They believe that God cannot be anthropomorphized physically, and so interpret the verses mentioning *yadu l-lahi* (the Hand of *Allāh*)<sup>21</sup> without presuming any relevance to God's physicality. Likewise, many bend reality to believe that God is merciful, proclaiming that the violence and cruelty God permits and inflicts upon creation is part of a

mercy that we do not (empirically) comprehend. The only thing most of them fail to recognize is their desire to anthropomorphize God psychologically. Not only are we incapable of empirically understanding God's mercy (in the sense that God knows things that we do not), but we are also incapable of theoretically understanding God's mercy (in the sense that if God gave us all the relevant information, the decisions we make would not be the same decisions God makes due to our different conceptions of mercy). The psychology of God cannot be presumed.

Clearly, such unorthodox beliefs made me a dangerous killjoy. If other queer Muslims engaged in "unIslamic" activity like sex and drugs,<sup>22</sup> I would be a constant reminder of the self-righteous suffering others inflict upon them. That Promise allowed me to avoid things like violence, conversion therapy, arranged marriage, homelessness, drug abuse, alcoholism, and suicide (for now). But in doing so I developed a mindset that hated in others everything that I hated in myself, which meant that anyone who got close to me would inevitably get hurt.

Besides, these queer Muslims could reasonably argue that the sin and suffering they caused while trying to find their authentic selves was unintended. They naively trusted immoral family members who wielded religion as a weapon. The sin and suffering they brought into this world while finding a new family was just an accident borne from relying on their survival instincts. If their parents suffered a stroke in that time, they could be forgiven. But I knew the risks of any actions I took. I had to believe that secret did not exist, or else everything I did would be no accident.

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There was a specific grey pub around here with a big neon union jack around the entrance. Its wooden interior created a cozy atmosphere at night when everything was illuminated by yellow lamps. This pub also had some rainbow flags inside, but it was not as

intense as the rest of the venues around here. Once inside, one could snack on a smattering of fried foods like fries, croquettes, pickles,<sup>23</sup> fish, nachos, and samosas (I wondered how these samosas would compare to authentic ones). For a meal, one could get steaks, pies, burgers, curry, and fried chicken, with various dips, and if one visited in time for brunch, several variations of an English breakfast would be available. For dessert, one could get tarts and cakes while washing it down with beer and ciders. The health-conscious could also supplement these foods with a salad. My stomach was grumbling by then, but I prioritized the water-tight plan hatched on the subway. It needed to be executed down to the letter, free from deviations. I recited the specific stool and order over and over in my head like a mantra. I just had to think of it like art: separate the culture from the colonizer, and everything would go according to plan.

I then noticed a mannequin in a store next to me.

It wore nothing except a piece of black lace underwear and thigh high stockings which left everything exposed.

I leapt away.

I took cover.

I stopped, dropped, and rolled.

Anything to avoid the appearance of association.

Anything to prevent the person watching me from taking note of my sins.

They would find me, and they would make me regret being here for the rest of my life.

The leather and the knife were not enough to dissuade the paranoia. I should have turned back a long time ago. I should have never gone here in the first place. I should have just died a long time ago instead of keeping up this charade.

As I dusted the dirt off the leather coat, I heard someone whisper something. I turned my

head, but nobody was around. I thought I saw them in a shadow, in an alleyway, in an alcove, but they did not appear. I thought I noticed something move in the window's reflection, but when I checked, all I noticed were black coals fitting for the leathery face of a demon. I checked every storefront. I saw a pizza shop, an optometrist, a Thai restaurant, an ice cream shop, another restaurant, just as normal as every other site of commerce, if not for ... that store. The other side of the street was the same, containing the average food market, a Japanese restaurant, and a café. I noticed someone exiting one of the restaurants. They wore a gaudy, shiny outfit vaguely resembling a train conductor's uniform. It was tightly bound to their body, and they were doing some kind of dance for the people inside, I think, when I realized that the gender of the person in the uniform was ambiguous.

I quickened my pace, trying to pretend I did not see what I saw. I looked at the next storefront—a cookie store. That was nice. It was probably overpriced, but maybe I could buy something from that store one day. There was once a time when I had a sweet tooth.

I looked a couple feet to the right of the cookie store, and I saw another sex store! Was one not enough? Was there such a pressing need? Did it spur the kind of free market competition a typical economics scholar waxes poetry about when describing the neoliberal “success” story in Chile?<sup>24</sup> The sight made me stare down into the pavement, as if a glance upwards would result in my execution. At times like this, I was glad for my nearsightedness, for it allowed me to take off my glasses and thereby make everything too blurry to make out. It was not quite so foolproof. I was still able to notice the colours of the flags in the stores, including one that was blue, pink, and white.

On the next corner, beyond a rainbow crosswalk, I finally found the glowing neon union jack, impossible to miss. By now I was immensely tired, the headache building up again. I was

also very afraid of restaurants. Most places I entered in this country coincided with a chill up my spine, like I was committing a crime by being there and that any moment I would be beaten and shot. So, I did not go out when I did not need to. By now I was like a foreigner in the country I was born and raised in, so unfamiliar with the geography of this city that my navigation was comparable to a tourist.

But something compelled me onwards, forcing me to slither inside despite the unsettling sensation that I was being watched.

It was loud. The shouts and cheers and endless chatter overwhelmed me. The lights were dimmed significantly to make the football game stand out. The white and green light coming from the TV screens illuminated patrons adorned in jerseys and paint, and who shovelled all manner of late-night snacks down their gullets. It was crowded, but the stool I planned out was empty. I sat on it, appearing like a lizard wearing human skin. The patrons seemed unfazed, too enamored with each other and the game to notice. To manage the sensory overload, my mind went somewhere far away where it could think about something else while treating everything around me as background noise.

Eventually, the bartender came up to me, an average fellow with a white face one could lose in a crowd. He asked me what I wanted, though I could barely hear him over the commotion.

“Can I get a pint of Guinness, please?”

“Pint of what?” he asked.

“Guinness,” I said, louder. Surely, I was pronouncing it right. It had to be “gi-ness.” Surely, one would not say “goo-ee-ness.” I doubted the authenticity of the cultural osmosis I received through the internet.

He got closer, so I repeated it again.

He still did not hear.

He got within an inch of my face, so I tried again.

And a fifth time after that, but I was still too quiet.

I noticed another patron's drink, so I pointed at it to make the social nightmare end.

When the bartender turned around, I cupped my face in my sweaty palms. I aged thirty years in thirty seconds. The cheers and screams made the throbbing headache worse, a torture device tightening around my skull, forcing me back into that Memory.

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He was not always angry. Most of the time He was an excessively loving father. But if He was angry, it meant there was something wrong with me. He was always angry about how quiet I was.

"How many times have I told you to speak up?" He yelled.

I did not say anything.

I always got quiet when He went like this, as if the core of my brain reverted to its most basic functions. I remained completely still in the middle of a mine field.

He paced around the living room while cursing under His breath, though the coffee table took all the open floor space. This made it quite difficult for Him to pace.

"One of your cousins called to tell us that he is having a boy, *Alhamdu lillāh* (Praise be to God). Me and the rest of your uncles congratulated him and made *du 'ā'* (supplications to God) that *inshā'Allāh* his boy will grow up strong and smart."

I still did not say anything.

"But I kept thinking, 'Wow, another one of my nephews is making real money, is

married, and is having a kid. What about my son?" I went to your room, and what do I see? You locked yourself behind that damn door again."

I remained silent.

That door gave me control. I considered it better to provoke Him like this than to lose that control over how He learned and interacted with me. That door was a necessary barrier.

"You always lock yourself behind that damn door!" He screamed.

"No matter how many times I tell you to keep it unlocked. No matter how many times I plead with you to stop closing yourself off. No matter how many times I threaten to tear it down, you never listen to me! You're going to give me a heart attack at this rate, is that what you want?"

I did not open my mouth.

I just had to endure until He was finished letting off some steam. This was always how I understood His anger. He got angrier at His wife for talking back to Him, and He got angrier at me for not talking at all. His anger was inevitable, like the setting sun. Something else probably constructed the walls. A maintenance policy, a rude neighbor, some trouble back in His country. It just meant that I became the verbal stress ball when I did or did not do something that broke the dam. It took me a long time to realize that everything I did or did not do could become the launching off point for a verbal beatdown. Until then, I walked on eggshells hoping I did not step on a mine, and when He did yell, whether at me or her or a scammer on the phone, I cried quietly into a pillow when I was alone. When I lost the capacity to cry, I just waited for the next mine, even when He was normal again.

"Are you stupid?" He screamed.

"Are you going to throw your life away in that damn room? Am I wasting my time

talking to an idiot?"

I remained as still as a statue.

"Answer me!" He screamed.

I learned to never let in what He said. He once had a massive headache during a crossing guard shift, so I ended up staying with Him. He hugged me while crying about one of His friends from His country who was in the hospital. This friend's family was so busy with their own lives that they could rarely visit. He then told me that all the friends He made meant nothing when He was sick. All of them were too busy with their own lives. I was the only one who would be there for Him.

But by then I already knew His words were eclipsed by the whistling wind. None of the things He said mattered. One day He would contradict everything He said all over again without a moment of self-reflection. Another day would come when He said what He really felt about me. I was proven right probably less than a month after He had that massive headache.

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My headache pulsated in time with my heartbeat as I pushed that Memory away. Peering through the gaps in my fingers, I witnessed the patrons of this pub in their natural habitat. They gobbled fries, fish, beer, burgers, shepherd's pie, and a slew of other items without a care about all the stains and crumbs produced. Food made me feel dirty and uncivilized, so I always ate small, simple, and quick meals with Western cutlery. She was tolerant of culinary complexity if it meant she could get protein and unsaturated fats, but the inefficiency of dealing with a hundred fish bones put me off many of the dishes of His people. Food was nothing more than fuel for the day, so I prioritized whatever demanded no brainpower and no cleanup.

These people jumped and heckled when a referee made what was obviously a biased

decision demonstrating clear favoritism, or at least that was how they viewed it. When they jumped, certain parts of certain people's bodies bounced. This distracted the men, and the women too in this part of the city, so my fingers shielded my eyes once more. I went somewhere far away, deep within my mind. Islamic positions on homosexuality were a constant obsession, as if running through the lines of argumentation a hundred thousand times would lead me to a breakthrough. I knew it would not, but that did not stop my mind from compelling me.

There are queer Muslims who would strongly push back against the notion that they are sinful or “unIslamic.” Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle’s 2013 book, *Living Out Islam: Voices of Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims*, includes one such account from a transgender South African woman named Nafeesa. She used to live as a conventional Muslim boy helping her father maintain the local *mosque*, but in her teenage years and adolescence, she discovered her real gender identity and sexual attraction, which made familial relationships difficult.<sup>25</sup>

When her mother tried to arrange a marriage (in which Nafeesa would be the husband), Nafeesa argued that such an arranged marriage would obviously lead to *fitna*. It was founded upon a ridiculous attempt to deceive the wife into thinking she was marrying someone manly, which would clearly lead to disaster. Comparing the *fitna* that would erupt when the wife realized she married someone effeminate against the (presumed) *fasād* (personal corruption) of her authentic life, the lesser evil should be clear (at least for her).<sup>26</sup> I guess she could not convince herself to maintain the act of masculinity.<sup>27</sup> Nafeesa also argued that the *Qur’ānic* verses condemning sodomy were relevant for the prophet Lot but did not extend to the Islamic ethics embodied in *The Prophet*. Thus, these verses do not carry normative power over Muslims.<sup>28</sup> This is an argument, if a bit too unorthodox to accept (i.e.: Why would the *Qur’ān* even mention the story of Lot if not to guide believers).

Perhaps one could argue that those verses are part of a series of clarifications that ultimately lead to homosexual marriage, akin to how the prohibition of alcohol proceeded in stages between verses 2:219, 4:43, and 5:90.<sup>29</sup> In this case, the Lot verses clarified a more extreme policy embodied in Judaeo-Christian revelations (I do not know the arguments modern queer Jews and Christians use when making queer readings of the Bible). The Judaic Old Testament explicitly states that it is an abomination to “lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman,” punishable by execution.<sup>30</sup> This might have been important when God’s covenant was with the ethnic Jews,<sup>31</sup> in which the growth of religion was limited to procreation. The Christian New Testament condemns homosexuality but did not call it an abomination requiring execution.<sup>32</sup> The inclusion of believing gentiles in God’s covenant might have facilitated this relaxed natalism (though societal prejudices limited the degree of relaxation).<sup>33</sup> The *Qur’ān* relaxed this further by limiting it to the case of Lot, wherein homosexuality is not condemned on its own, but made a part of the general *fāhisha* (sexual immorality) committed by the people of Lot, comorbid with the sins of infidelity, sexual assault, and disbelief.<sup>34</sup>

One can then argue that the eventual permissibility of homosexual marriage was intended by God in the same way that prohibition and the abolition of slavery was intended by God. In all three cases, a societal prejudice/custom convinced God to reveal His revelation in stages directing believers towards a more moderate position. This facilitates monogamous, consensual gay marriage once homophobia is no longer a hegemonic cultural institution<sup>35</sup> in the same way that prohibition and abolition were established once social drinking and slavery were no longer hegemonic social and economic institutions.<sup>36</sup>

Even this argument is a bit too unorthodox for most Muslims. First is the authenticity of the Bible. In Islamic theology, the Torah and the *Injīl* (the Gospels) were revealed by God, but

their followers corrupted and obfuscated the original teachings.<sup>37</sup> This makes it difficult to determine what parts of the Bible Muslims would accept as part of the original revelation. A verse could be a part of God's original revelation, or it could be a corruption meant to dilute the original message. This did not stop Muslims across the ages from relying on Judaeo-Christian theology when interpreting the *Qur'ān*,<sup>38</sup> but it would probably give them a reason to reject an interpretation they did not like.

Second, the actual text of the *Qur'ān* makes it difficult to argue that homosexuality was only ever indirectly sinful due to its comorbidity with infidelity, sexual assault, and disbelief.

Verse 7:81 quotes Lot saying the following to his people:

*Innakum* (Indeed, you) *latatūna* (approach) *l-rijāla* (the men) *shahwatan* (lustfully) *min-dūni* (instead of) *l-nisā'* (the women). *Bal antum qawmun mus'rifūn* (Nay, you are a people who commit excesses).<sup>39</sup>

Verse 27:55 quotes Lot saying the following to his people:

*A-innakum* (Why do you) *latatūna* (approach) *l-rijāla* (the men) *shahwatan* (with lust) *min-dūni* (instead of) *l-nisā'* (the women)? *Bal antum qawmun tajhalūn* (Nay, you are a people ignorant).<sup>40</sup>

To interpret these verses as exclusively focusing on sexual assault, one would have to assume it is fine to sexually assault women. To interpret these verses as exclusively focusing on infidelity,<sup>41</sup> one would have to assume that gender did not matter even though these verses differentiated the targets of sexual lust and the non-target of sexual lust by their gender.

If verses 7:81 and 27:55 used *zawj/azwāj* (spouse/spouses), one could plausibly argue that homophobia was not the primary interpretation of these verse. For example, verses 26:165–166 quotes Lot emphasizing the approaching of men instead of one's wives (in which case

homosexuality is only bad if it causes conflict in the institution of marriage):

*Atatūna* (Do you approach) *l-dhuk'rāna* (the males) *mina* (among) *l-‘ālamīn* (the worlds)?<sup>42</sup> *Watadharūna* (And leave) *mā khalaqa lakum rabbukum* (those whom your Lord created for you) *min azwājikum* (to be your mates)? *Bal antum qawmun ‘ādūn* (Nay, you are a people transgressing).<sup>43</sup>

But by using *l-rijāla* (the men) and *l-nisā'* (the women) together, those verses to me suggested a condemnation of multiple standalone sins. Instead of condemning these sins only when they are all together, these verses to me seem to condemn each of these sins as separate aspects of *fāhisha*, and the fantastical nature of the People of Lot was that they committed all these sins at the same time.<sup>44</sup> I could not convince myself to buy the arguments these queer Muslims presented to argue that these Arabic words condemned sexual assault without also condemning homosexuality.<sup>45</sup>

My failure to believe in a progressive interpretation of the *Qur’ān* ultimately led me to reject the law-oriented arguments presented by queer Muslims to support their identity. They argue that the story of Lot condemned sexual assault and infidelity, which is within one's agency.<sup>46</sup> Innate gender and sexuality however are outside of one's reasonable agency, originating in one's innate disposition (*shākila*), genetics (*tabī'a*), and *fitra*.<sup>47</sup> This means that wholesome homosexual marriage has little in common with the people of Lot. After all, hypermasculine heterosexual men in homophobic cultures often weaponize sexual assault to humiliate, abuse, and disempower each other. This is because the prejudice against “passive” homosexuals (based on perceived effeminacy/feminization)<sup>48</sup> adds a social cost to men who are sexually assaulted. Hypermasculine men exploit this to secure their position in certain social hierarchies among men.<sup>49</sup> Authentically homosexual people are a minority in all societies and do

not regard the “passive” role in sex as fundamentally humiliating, abusive, or disempowering because of perceived effeminacy. So, the logics and logistics underlying the behavior of the people of Lot have more in common with homophobic societies than progressive ones. If Lot was resurrected, He would probably condemn what goes on in hypermasculine Russian army barracks and the forensic “anal examinations” inflicted upon suspected homosexuals in Egypt and Iraq<sup>50</sup> before looking into what goes on in Canadian pride parades.

Furthermore, the verses cited to exclusively prohibit female homosexuality, verses 4:15–4:16, is very broad.<sup>51</sup>

Verse 4:15 condemns:

*Wa-llātī yatīna* (And those who commit) *l-fāhishata* (sexual immorality) *min* (from) *nisāikum* (your women).<sup>52</sup>

Verse 4:16 condemns:

*Wa-lladhāni* (And the two who) *yatiyānihā* (commit it) *minkum* (among you).<sup>53</sup>

Without a homophobic Lot story serving as context, this description of *fāhishata* is not articulated in a way that naturally includes homosexuality (two people of the same gender committing sexual immorality encompasses a lot of heterosexual crimes). This means that there is space for male and female homosexual marriages in the same way other non-natalist marriages are permitted, like marriages with barren/impotent spouses,<sup>54</sup> spouses who do not have functioning reproductive organs, and spouses who use coitus interruptus (‘azl).<sup>55</sup>

These arguments would be plausible for me, but only if verses 7:81 and 27:55 were worded differently. These verses embedded themselves so deep into my psyche that every single time I heard or read someone claim that the *Qur’ān*’s position on homosexuality is unclear or ambiguous or unmentioned, I was forced to recite *latatūna l-rijāla shahwatan min-dūni l-nisā’*

(approach the men lustfully instead of the women) in my head like a cursed earworm. I did not want to believe that the Lord of the worlds wanted to exterminate me and hundred of thousands of people like me, just for the crime of existing, but I could never assure myself that God was psychologically comprehensible. And so it was that all my functions were overridden by a malevolent force compelling me towards unspeakable evil, in this world and the next.

*Latatūna l-rijāla shahwatan min-dūni l-nisā'.*

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*Ch 4 Notes*

<sup>1</sup> Note that this might make some cheeses *harām*. Also note that none of this “research” was done outside of ChatGPT, so its truthfulness is questionable, although that would not stop religious people from having an uncomfortable feeling of ambiguity: ChatGPT, response to “Is chocolate liquor made with liquor and root beer made with beer?,” *OpenAI*, September 27, 2024, <https://chatgpt.com/share/6701b2a8-d4dc-8006-ae68-c11284d10ec1>; *Understanding Halal Foods*, (Toronto: Toronto Public Heath, 2014), [https://www.studentnutritionontariotoronto.ca/uploads/6/5/1/7/65174685/halal\\_guide\\_2014.pdf](https://www.studentnutritionontariotoronto.ca/uploads/6/5/1/7/65174685/halal_guide_2014.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Note that this might have been influenced by season 1, episode 4 of the Marvel comics’ cartoon, *Avengers: Earth’s Mightiest Heroes*, in which the character Kang the Conqueror uses a device to directly investigate the life of the character Captain America. This device can peer directly into any place and time like an incorporeal spectator, thereby allowing Kang to view private and unrecorded moments in Captain America’s life. A child might imagine that at least one time traveller in the distant future might be capable of doing this, and if it was possible for that child to become a subject of world history when they grew up, then they might believe that they should act according to the expectation that there is a time traveller peering into every private moment of their life: Marvel HQ (@MarvelHQ), “Meet Captain America | Avengers: End Games!” *YouTube*, Feb 22, 2024, 1:17–1:30, 18:20–20:33, 21:15–22:00, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0wJ3kKtzEZQ>.

<sup>3</sup> Petra L. Doan, *Planning and LGBTQ Communities: The Need for Inclusive Queer Spaces* (New York, N.Y: Routledge, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315756721>, p. 6, 9, 188–189, 253.

<sup>4</sup> According to Transatlantic Agency, Samra Habib’s pronouns are they/them. I do not know if this information is up to date with their current gender identity, but this is the only source I found on their pronouns: “Samra Habib,” *Transatlantic Agency*, n.d., <https://www.transatlanticagency.com/clients/speakers/samra-habib/>.

<sup>5</sup> Samra Habib, *We Have Always Been Here: A Queer Muslim Memoir* (Toronto: Viking, an imprint of Penguin Canada, a division of Penguin Random House Canada Limited, 2019), p. 22–24, 27–30, 36–39, 41–42.

<sup>6</sup> Habib, *A Queer Muslim Memoir*, p. 43–52, 54–60, 76–81.

<sup>7</sup> Habib, *A Queer Muslim Memoir*, p. 61–65, 68–72, 81–83, 91–97, 101–105.

<sup>8</sup> Habib, *A Queer Muslim Memoir*, p. 105, 109.

<sup>9</sup> Habib, *A Queer Muslim Memoir*, p. 121–125, 125–129, 137–139, 141–154.

<sup>10</sup> Habib, *A Queer Muslim Memoir*, p. 142, 159–161, 163, 166–172, 205–210.

<sup>11</sup> Habib, *A Queer Muslim Memoir*, p. 143–144, 149–157.

<sup>12</sup> Habib, *A Queer Muslim Memoir*, p. 110–111, 118–120, 130–132, 140, 192–196, 202.

<sup>13</sup> Habib, *A Queer Muslim Memoir*, p. 14–16.

<sup>14</sup> Habib, *A Queer Muslim Memoir*, p. 61–65, 68–72, 81–83.

<sup>15</sup> Habib, *A Queer Muslim Memoir*, p. 93–94.

<sup>16</sup> Opinions may differ

<sup>17</sup> Habib, *A Queer Muslim Memoir*, p. 97–100, 104–105, 107–108, 114–116, 158–159.

<sup>18</sup> Afdhere Jama, *Queer Jihad: LGBT Muslims on Coming out, Activism, and the Faith* (United States: Oracle Releasing, 2013), p. 43, 49, 58, 73, 83, 103–104, 156, 170.

<sup>19</sup> Habib, *A Queer Muslim Memoir*, p. 178–181.

<sup>20</sup> Habib, *A Queer Muslim Memoir*, p. 164–166, 170–172, 214.

<sup>21</sup> Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, trans. *The Noble Qur’ān: English Translations of the meanings and commentary* (Madinah: King Fahd Glorious Qur’ān Printing Complex, 2015), 3:73, 5:64, 48:10, 67:1.; “Verse (48:10) - Word by Word,” *Quranic Arabic Corpus Word by Word Grammar, Syntax and Morphology of the Holy Quran*, accessed September 1, 2024, <https://corpus.quran.com/wordbyword.jsp?chapter=48&verse=10>.

<sup>22</sup> Jama, *Queer Jihad*, p. 73, 83–84, 105, 171.; Habib, *A Queer Muslim Memoir*, p. 80, 96–97, 113, 141–142, 151, 155.; Shanon Shah, *The Making of a Gay Muslim: Religion, Sexuality and Identity in Malaysia and Britain* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-63130-1>, p. 1–3, 11, 26, 73–74, 123, 188–189, 230–232, 235–236.

<sup>23</sup> Note that fried pickles are a dish I never knew existed.

<sup>24</sup> Note that this is a facetious reference to Augusto Pinochet’s “success” implementing neoliberal policies in Chile between 1973 and 1989, and how such cases are uncritically used to support orthodox free-market economic ideology in standard economic scholarship: Daniel Hellinger, *Comparative Politics of Latin America: Democracy at Last?* 2nd ed (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 25, 31, 179, 182–184, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203522448>;

William Finnegan, *The Economics of Empire: Notes on the Washington Consensus*, Harper's, Vol. 306 (New York, N.Y.: Harper's Magazine Foundation, 2003), p. 44–45.

<sup>25</sup> Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle, *Living Out Islam: Voices of Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.18574/9780814707968>, p. 35–37.

<sup>26</sup> Kugle, *Voices of Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims*, p. 37–38.

<sup>27</sup> Perhaps she expected the costs of transition to be less than \$97,985.

<sup>28</sup> Kugle, *Voices of Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims*, p. 39.

<sup>29</sup> Al-Hilali and Khan, *Qur'ān*, 2:219n1; 4:43, 5:90.

<sup>30</sup> *The King James Study Bible, Second Ed.* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013), Leviticus 18:22, Leviticus 20:13.

<sup>31</sup> *Study Bible*, Genesis 12:1–3, Exodus 19:5–6, Deuteronomy 7:6–14, Isaiah 41:8–9.

<sup>32</sup> *Study Bible*, Romans 1:26–27, 1 Corinthians 6:9, 1 Timothy 1:9–10.

<sup>33</sup> *Study Bible*, Matthew 28:19–20, Acts 10:34–43, Romans 1:16, Galatians 3:26–29, Ephesians 2:11–13.

<sup>34</sup> Al-Hilali and Khan, *Qur'ān*, 7:80–84, 11:77–82, 15:55–77, 26:160–173, 27:54–58, 29:28–31, 50:12–14, 66:10.; Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle, *Homosexuality in Islam: Critical Reflection on Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims* (Oxford, England: Oneworld Publications, 2010), p. 53.

<sup>35</sup> Kugle, *Homosexuality in Islam*, p. 39–40, 61–62.

<sup>36</sup> Bernard K. Freamon, *Possessed by the Right Hand: The Problem of Slavery in Islamic Law and Muslim Cultures* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), p. 90, 95, 104, 112, 134–139, 144–147, 333, 368.; Kugle, *Homosexuality in Islam*, p. 203–205.

<sup>37</sup> Al-Hilali and Khan, *Qur'ān*, 2:75–79, 3:3–4, 5:13–17, 5:44–48.

<sup>38</sup> Note that *tafsīr* (*Qur'ānic* exegesis) for verses 4:1, 7:189, 16:72, 30:21, 39:6, 42:11 use *ḥadīth* affirming the Biblical story of Eve being created from Adam's rib. The verses do not mention the Biblical rib story or the forbidden apple story, though some verses might at least describe Eve as an offshoot of Adam depending on how one interprets the part of verse 4:1 describing how God creates mankind from *nafsin* (a soul) *wāḥidatīn* (single) *wakhalqa* (and created) *min'hā* (from it) *zawjāhā* (its mate) *wabatha* (and dispersed) *min'humā* (from both of them) *rijālān* (men) *kathīrān* (many) *wanisāān* (and women). Thus, some scholars and exegetes affirm the Biblical account of Eve while others distinguish the *Qur'ānic* account of Eve as separate from Biblical ones, which might be relevant if one is willing to regard *ḥadīth* condemning homosexuality as similarly Biblical in origin: "Verse (4:1) - Word by Word," *Quranic Arabic Corpus.*; Al-Hilali and Khan, *Qur'ān*, 4:1, 7:189, 16:72, 30:21, 39:6, 42:11.; Zohar Hadromi-Allouche, "Hāwā": Eve in Medieval Islamic Sources," In *The Routledge Companion to Eve*, 1st ed, p. 93–97, 101, Routledge, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003132332-8>; Amir Lerner, "Rib or Side, Right or Left and the Traits of Women: Midrashic Dilemmas about the Creation of Eve in Medieval Islamic Tradition and Literature," *Studia Islamica* 114, no. 1 (2019): 27–46, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26745548>.

<sup>39</sup> "Verse (7:80) - Word by Word," *Quranic Arabic Corpus*.

<sup>40</sup> "Verse (27:53) - Word by Word," *Quranic Arabic Corpus*.

<sup>41</sup> Kugle, *Homosexuality in Islam*, p. 54–56.

<sup>42</sup> "Verse (26:163) - Word by Word," *Quranic Arabic Corpus*.

<sup>43</sup> Al-Hilali and Khan, *Qur'ān*, 26:166; "Verse (26:166) - Word by Word," *Quranic Arabic Corpus*.

<sup>44</sup> Perhaps in some people's imagination, the people of Lot were condemned for sin-bingo.

<sup>45</sup> Junaid Jahangir, and Hussein Abdullatif, *Islamic Law and Muslim Same-Sex Unions* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2016), p. 31–32, 36–39, 43–48.

<sup>46</sup> Jama, *Queer Jihad*, p. 37.; Kugle, *Homosexuality in Islam*, p. 50–55.; Kugle, *Voices of Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims*, p. 31–32; Ludovic Lofti Mohamed Zahed, *Homosexuality, Transidentity, and Islam: A Study of Scripture Confronting the Politics of Gender and Sexuality*, trans. Adi S. Bharat (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9789048544080>, p. 26–29.; Jahangir and Abdullatif, *Islamic Law and Muslim Same-Sex Unions*, p. 12–14, 25–29, 52–53.

<sup>47</sup> Jama, *Queer Jihad*, p. 35.; Kugle, *Homosexuality in Islam*, p. 45–48; Kugle, *Voices of Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims*, p. 25, 30; Zahed, *Homosexuality, Transidentity, and Islam*, p. 19–22.

<sup>48</sup> Note that such homophobia also devalues femininity, which means a devaluing of women and womanly traits.

<sup>49</sup> Human Rights Watch, *No Escape: Male Rape in U.S. Prisons* (April 2001),

<https://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/prison/report4.html>; Jahangir and Abdullatif, *Islamic Law and Muslim Same-Sex Unions*, p. 29–33.; Luke Harding, "Russian army sold recruits for sex, rights group claims," *The Guardian*, February 14, 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/feb/14/russia.lukeharding>; Hank Nuwer, "Smokeouts and Smokescreens: Military Hazing," in *Hazing: Destroying Young Lives*, ed. Hank Nuwer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), p. 296, 298–299.; Noelle Buchanan, Diederik Lohman, Anna Neistat, Alexander Petrov, Rachel Denber, Veronika Leila Szente Goldston, Dinah PoKempner, Widney Brown, "The Wrongs Of Passage: Inhuman and Degrading Treatment of New Recruits in the Russian Armed Forces," *Human Rights Watch* Vol. 16,

No. 8 (2004), p. 50–52, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2004/10/19/wrongs-passage/inhuman-and-degrading-treatment-new-recruits-russian-armed-forces>.

<sup>50</sup> Note that these “anal examinations” are based on garbage “science” claiming that one can physiologically tell if a man has received anal sex (homophobic societies are a lot more concerned over receivers of anal sex). When confronted with their pseudoscience, the “doctors” performing these examinations admit that their only metric of determining if a person is a homosexual is how they react when told to get into the position for anal examination (on all-fours). These “doctors” claim that only a homosexual would immediately know what position to get into, and not fight against the doctor. This ignores how the physical and psychological torment people accused of homosexuality already faced before getting the examination primes them to do whatever the “doctor” says: Sequareah Sayles, “That Awkward Moment When...: An Explanation of How Britain Made the Modern Arab World Homophobic,” *Honors Theses* (Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College: University of Mississippi, 2015), p. 34–38, [https://egrove.olemiss.edu/hon\\_thesis/847](https://egrove.olemiss.edu/hon_thesis/847).

<sup>51</sup> Kugle, *Homosexuality in Islam*, p. 63–65. 155–157.; Zahed, *Homosexuality, Transidentity, and Islam*, p. 29–30.; Jahangir and Abdullatif, *Islamic Law and Muslim Same-Sex Unions*, p. 16, 48–52.

<sup>52</sup> “Verse (4:15) - Word by Word,” *Quranic Arabic Corpus*.

<sup>53</sup> “Verse (4:15) - Word by Word,” *Quranic Arabic Corpus*.

<sup>54</sup> For a rigorous examination of how infertile marriages were understood in *fiqh*, See: Sara Verskin, *Barren Women: Religion and Medicine in the Medieval Middle East* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110596588>.

<sup>55</sup> Note that there are various *ḥadīth* from *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* and two from *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī* making ‘azl permissible. There is two in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* that describes coitus interruptus as burying the fetus alive, but the majority argue that God will create children regardless of what we do (i.e.: Maryam became pregnant without having intercourse, so insemination is not necessary in Islamic theology). So at least from an orthodox perspective, it appears permissible, if possibly on the side of being *mubāh* or *makrūh*. A more detailed analysis may reveal errors in narration, but that is outside the scope of this book.

However, many of these *ḥadīth* also talk about coitus interruptus in the context of having sex with an enslaved/imprisoned woman to reduce the likelihood of conception, so this is not exactly a progressive theology. This carries strange implications about Islamic sexual ethics. Is the prejudice against masturbation and adultery based on the presumption that a man could instead procure sex from a slave? Is sexual chastity important for women solely based on the association between female sexuality and low-status enslaved women? These questions can be vexing for a contemporary Muslims: *Muhammad ibn Ismā’īl ibn Ibrāhīm al-Ju’fī Al-Bukhārī*, “(32) Chapter: Ghazwa of Banu Al-Mustaliq or the Ghazwa of Al-Muraishi,” In *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī*, Book 64, *Hadīth* 182, accessed Sep 1, 2024, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/64/182>; *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī*, Book 97, *Hadīth* 38.; *Abū al-Husayn ‘Asākir ad-Dīn Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj ibn Muslim*, “(22) Chapter: The ruling on coitus interrupts ('Azl),” In *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book 16, *Hadīth* 146–163, accessed Sep 1, 2024, <https://sunnah.com/muslim/16/146-163>. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book 16, *Hadīth* 167–169.

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